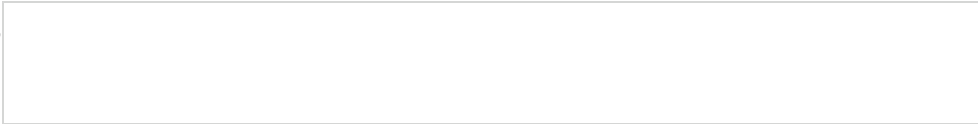




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World Environment Day: Agriculture as heritage

Uma Sudhir, Saturday June 5, 2010, Hyderabad

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Dalit women farmers from 75 villages in the Medak district of Andhra Pradesh have been growing the traditional millet crops on dry, marginal lands. That is a celebration of life for them.

This group of marginal farmers who have been practicing eco-friendly agriculture in Andhra Pradesh for generations have come forward to claim Agro Biodiversity Heritage Status under the law (the Biological Diversity Act of 2002).

"We are very small, marginal farmers but we are growing nutritious foods that are also making our soil healthy. We want our crops to be valued. After all, we are able to feed others also instead of asking for help," said Chandamma, a traditional farmer.

"With just two months rain, even if 10 crops fail, 10 others grow. So we have no suicides, no desperate farmers and no debts," added Samamma, a millet farmer.

Activists argue that at a time when climate change is a primary concern, there is every reason to confer the agrobiodiversity heritage site status as this kind of agriculture guzzles neither water nor power, it provides nutritious food and protects the environment.

"By law, they can't use chemicals, they will remain organic. So the price of the crops will get premium and the contamination that genetic engineering and other new age crops will bring, it will be free of it," said P.V.Satheesh, National Convenor, Millet Network of India.

The Andhra Pradesh State Biodiversity Board has reacted positivity to the first-ever claim by local communities in Medak to be recognised as India's Agro Biodiversity Heritage Site. A big step forward in this International Year dedicated to Biodiversity.

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